
Judiciary Committee

SSB 5528

Title: An act relating to making technical nonsubstantive corrections to the initial point of contact program established in chapter 496, Laws of 2007.

Brief Description: Making technical nonsubstantive corrections to the initial point of contact program established in chapter 496, Laws of 2007.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Human Services & Corrections (originally sponsored by Senator Hargrove).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Makes changes to the initial point of contact program that counties may create to assist parties in dissolution cases.
- Removes the requirement that the program provide screening and referral services.
- Clarifies how the county may fund the program through user fees and a surcharge on filing dissolution cases.
- Removes the requirement that the Administrative Office of the Courts reimburse counties for copies of the family law handbook that the county distributes to parties in dissolution cases.

Hearing Date: 3/23/09

Staff: Trudes Tango (786-7384)

Background:

In 2007 the Legislature passed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5470 which, among other things, authorized counties to create a program to provide services to all parties involved in dissolution proceedings. Counties may create this program, which has been referred to as the "initial point of contact" program, after July 1, 2009 but no later than November 1, 2009. If state funding is provided, counties must create the program.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

At a minimum, the program must:

- include an individual to serve as an initial point of contact for parties filing dissolution or legal separation petitions;
- inform parties about courthouse facilitation programs;
- inform parties of alternatives to filing for dissolution;
- inform parties of supportive family services available in the community;
- screen for referral services for domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and mental health; and
- assist the court in dissolution cases.

A petitioner for dissolution must allege that he or she met and conferred with the program before filing the petition. Parties must meet and confer with the program before participating in mediation.

To fund the program, the county legislative authority may impose user fees or impose a surcharge of up to \$20 on cases filed under the domestic relations laws.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) creates a family law handbook that explains the rights and obligations of spouses to each other and their children during marriage and after dissolution. The county auditor must provide the family law handbook to persons applying for marriage licenses.

The handbook must also be provided to petitioners and respondents in dissolution cases. The AOC must reimburse the counties annually for each copy of the handbook that is distributed directly to family law parties if the county submits documentation regarding the number of handbooks distributed on an annual basis.

Summary of Bill:

Changes are made to the initial point of contact program that counties may create. The program must be an information and referral program with an individual serving as an initial point of contact for the dissemination of information. The program no longer requires screening for referral to services for areas of domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, and mental health. The program is no longer required to provide assistance to the court in dissolution cases.

It is clarified that the county legislative authority may impose a surcharge of up to \$20 on dissolution cases filed, rather than on all domestic relations cases. In addition, the county legislative authority may impose both a user fee and the surcharge.

The requirement that AOC reimburse counties for copies of the handbook that are distributed directly to family law parties is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 20, 2009.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.